

KING KONG REVISITED

-- from the Alternative History Series

King Kong climbed to the tower of the Empire State Building, pulling himself up with one hand and fondling Fay Wray with the other. When the planes came to shoot him down, he put Fay Wray on a ledge, grabbed a plane that came too close, broke it into pieces and hurled the metal chunks at the other planes, knocking them down one after the other. Another squadron was sent in from New Jersey, only to be smashed out of the sky by slabs torn from the tower. From a plane that had crashed on the observation platform, King Kong wrenched twin machine guns and sprayed bullets at the police and troops below. As the sky darkened and the searchlights came on, King Kong plucked furniture from office windows and heaved it at the lights, picking them off one by one. With the tower shrouded by the moonless night, reinforcements were called and army trucks from Pershing Field brought in new explosives and searchlights while the President ordered the National Guard mobilized and by radio tried to quell the growing panic. Now the heavy artillery was in place and again the searchlights cut through the night sky, but only the remains of the tower were seen. King Kong was gone.

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On the long barge King Kong lay peacefully, paddling with one hand toward the Balearic Islands and with the other chug-a-lugging pails of Martinis mixed by Fay Wray who cuddled seductively on the furry chest and watched the gulls wheel through the mist. "I got to hand it to you, baby," she said woozily, clinking her glass against the pail. "You may not say much, but I can tell you're always thinking."

-- William Sayres

Kabul

COFFEE? WINE!?

A seeker declared himself instantly upon arriving at the gates of the temple.

"I am looking for the wisest man in this village. I am tired of this life of debauchery which I have been leading.

I yearn to be the disciple of a holy man, a true ascetic."

He was taken without a word to an old man who looked ascetic outwardly: he was tanned and weather-beaten by sun and wind, very thin and supple.

The seeker looked upon this man and thought to himself, Now here is a man who has conquered his carnal desires, a man who can teach me self-discipline and mastery over the cravings of the flesh.

He presented himself in supplication before the Adept, for such he was in truth. After hearing the youth's plea, the Adept replied, "Well, I am not very interested in teaching asceticism, but you can be my partner in my wanderings for a few days at least. I must ask one thing of you, however: for the love of Allah, let me go where I must go and do not get in my way!"

"Certainly," answered the young man. When they went to bed later that night, the youth dreamed amiably of wandering in the wilds of the desert with this holy one in search of truth.

The next few days were very confusing for the seeker. The Adept not only took him to every one of his own haunts from the recent past -- the gambling parlor, the coffee-house, the tavern, the theatre, the restaurants -- but he noticed this supposed ascetic drinking wine, mingling with gamblers and ruffians, eating all sorts of foods, and drinking the strongly stimulating coffee. How strange! the youth thought to himself.

While it was obvious that the Adept did not indulge heavily in any of these pleasures, still the youth was astounded that a man of the Path would frequent bad company and partake of alcohol and coffee. How were such pleasures consistent with the Way of renunciation of the world?

This occurred for some time until the youth finally broke down to exclaim, "How could you do this? You speak the words of an ascetic, you look like an ascetic, and yet you seem quite at ease in a gambling house, a restaurant or even a tavern! Are these places to be avoided, or not? What is the meaning of this?"

The Adept took him aside and answered softly, "Did you also take great care to notice that in my own house I eat simply and sparingly, and that I have no stimulants or alcohol in my cupboard? If I enter a tavern and have nothing to drink, I will be open to unreasoning suspicion. Many people will think that I am insulting their indulgences by abstaining before them. There is a chance that I may invite upon myself the wrath of the insecure."

He continued. "However, if I wish to discover the common bond between us, so that I may teach and learn, I must

use the materials consistent with my environment."

"Besides, of all the people with whom I interact in the city, how many of them do you think would follow me to the top of a mountain?"

KOAN

Kochu was a student of Zen.

One day Kochu climbed up the steep face of a mountain to visit a hermit monk. He found the monk sipping tea in his little hut.

The monk served tea to Kochu in silence. After a few moments, the monk bowed and said, "I am honored by your visit. May I help you in some way?"

Kochu replied, "I am confused by what the people say about you in the village. Some say that you are a great master of Zen and that much can be learned from you. Others say that you are no more than an eccentric old hermit, and that it would be a waste of time to sit at your feet with the hopes of learning anything. Forgive me for repeating these things others have said of you: I only want to know the truth."

The monk rose slowly from the floor. Silently, he beckoned Kochu to follow him. They walked together out of the hut, into the warmth of the sunshine. Kochu was led around the back of the hut, where the monk stopped before a beautiful cherry-blossom tree in full bloom, its leaves gently swaying in the mild summer breeze. The air was thick with the scent of the blossoms, and the stillness of the mountain-side was slightly broken by the faint droning of the bees as they gathered pollen from the tiny flowers.

The monk sat down before the tree, then beckoned to Kochu. "Sit with me for a while, please. Let us observe together the life of this tree."

The student and the monk sat in deep contemplation, still and alert. The monk then turned to Kochu after a few moments.

"Can you tell me how this tree obtains its nourishment?"

Kochu paused thoughtful before answering.

"Its roots travel deep into the earth, where they receive minerals and water from the soil. Also, its leaves receive the sun's light as well as nourishment from the air."